

Best Management Practices

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION



Peregrine falcon

Falco peregrinus

Common name • Peregrine falcon

Scientific name • *Falco peregrinus*

State status • Endangered

Ecology

Peregrine falcons are found on every continent except Antarctica. They breed in the arctic tundra through Europe and North America, and south into Africa, South America, the Pacific Islands and Australia. During the winter, North American peregrines migrate from breeding grounds in the north to as far south as the tip of South America. Peregrines inhabit open areas usually associated with high cliffs and bluffs over rivers and coasts. In Missouri, these falcons are observed most often during spring and fall migration, especially in areas with high concentrations of shorebirds and waterfowl. Currently, the only known nesting pairs are using buildings, bridges or power plants near Kansas City and St. Louis. Adults lay two to six eggs per clutch. Eggs are incubated for 30-32 days, and young fly from the nest after about five to six weeks. Peregrine falcons mostly prey on birds, but they will also eat amphibians, insects and mammals.

Reasons for Decline

In the eastern United States, declines of peregrine falcons began in the 1940s when environmental contaminants were introduced. By 1970, peregrine falcon numbers had decreased to the point that there were no known nesting pairs in the eastern United States. Contaminants such as DDT built up in the fatty tissue of the birds that preyed on contaminated insects, and this caused the birds to lay thin-shelled eggs that often broke under the incubating parent before chicks hatched. Once DDT was banned in 1972, peregrine falcon populations began to increase with the help of captive rearing and release programs. Current threats to the populations include human disturbance of nesting birds, alteration of nesting and wintering habitat, and continued use of environmental contaminants.

Specific Recommendations

While many peregrine falcons have begun nesting on tall buildings and power plant exhaust towers in urban areas throughout the United States, it is important to maintain natural open areas,

especially near streams and rivers, for these birds. It is hoped that eventually natural cliff nesting pairs will occur again.

→ Project activities should not occur within 1,500 meters of areas where peregrine falcons are reproducing (April 15 July 15).

→ Dispose of chemicals, toxic waste, garbage and waste water from trucks in areas designated for such wastes. These sites should be away from streams and other bodies of water.

→ Avoid use of pesticides and other contaminants whenever possible, as peregrine falcons will act as natural predators of many unwanted insects.

Information Contacts

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